

Congressman Henry Waxman to Retire

By Melissa Caskey / melissa@malibutimes.com | Posted: Wednesday, February 5, 2014 1:00 pm

Longtime U.S. Congressman Henry Waxman, a Democratic stalwart who helped spearhead historic legislation on tobacco, healthcare, the environment and the prescription drug industry, announced last week he would not run for reelection next fall after serving 40 years in the House of Representatives.

Waxman's 33rd Congressional district includes Malibu, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica and several other west Los Angeles cities.

"After 40 years in Congress, it's time for someone else to have the chance to make his or her mark, ideally someone who is young enough to make the long-term commitment that's required for real legislative success," Waxman said.

One of the authors behind the 2010 Affordable Care Act, Waxman's prolific legislative career includes a bill that required nutrition labeling on food, the Ryan White CARE Act that granted more rights to AIDS/HIV patients and the Clean Air Act. He was also an integral force in 1994 hearings to expose misdeeds of the tobacco industry and served as chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee from 2008 through 2010.

Waxman figures to be a crucial loss for House Democrats in an increasingly polarized Congress. Though considered one of the Congress's most liberal and partisan members, the congressman developed a reputation for his ability to work across the aisle over landmark legislation.

Waxman cited in his statement an absence of compromise in today's Congress, in which increased polarization has rendered the body incapable of passing large pieces of legislation.

"There are elements of Congress today that I do not like. I abhor the extremism of the Tea Party Republicans. I am embarrassed that the greatest legislative body in the world too often operates in a partisan intellectual vacuum, denying science, refusing to listen to experts and ignoring facts," Waxman said.

But, Waxman said the continuing polarization of political factions in Congress was not part of his decision to retire.

"I am not leaving because I think House Democrats have no chance to retake the House. House Republicans have no compelling vision for the future. The public understands this, and I am confident that the Democrats can regain control of the House," Waxman said.

The 74-year-old's political career began in 1969 when he defeated an incumbent for a seat in the

California State Assembly and went on to serve three terms. In 1974, Waxman ran for an open seat in the U.S. Congress. He has been re-elected 17 times since first winning the House seat.

As news of Waxman's retirement broke last Thursday, the pool to replace him began filling rapidly. Former Los Angeles mayoral candidate Wendy Greuel announced her intention to run. State Sen. Ted Lieu threw his hat in the ring. Local representatives Richard Bloom of the state assembly and Sen. Fran Pavley were also said to be mulling possible runs. County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who is terming out of his post on the Board of Supervisors this year, was thrown into the rumor mill as well.

Another name that surfaced was Sandra Fluke, an attorney women's right activist who attracted national attention last year when Republican lawmakers barred her from testifying in Washington on the benefits of providing birth control to women. Fluke lives on the East Coast, but Congressional candidates are not required to live in the district they are seeking to represent. Independent Marianne Williamson is also running for the seat.